

Dairying in Duxbury 1915 - 1945

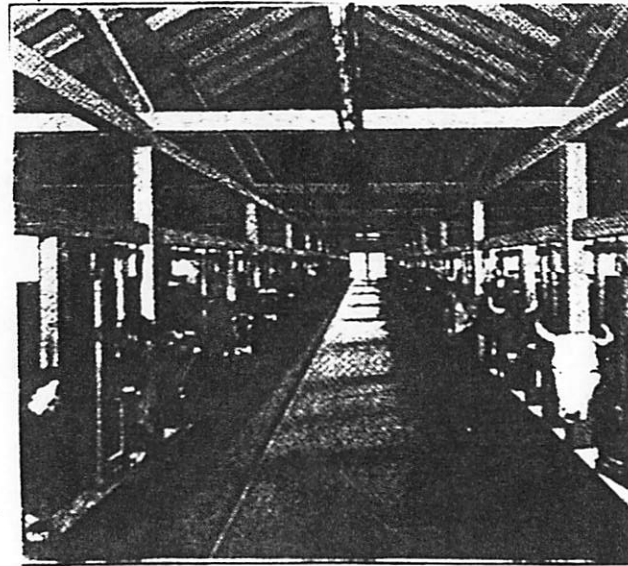
BY REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

*Hey diddle, diddle
The Cat and the Fiddle*

*The cow jumped over the moon
The little dog laughed to see such sport
And the dish ran away with the spoon*

Clipper readers ask me occasionally where I get the subjects for my Duxbury stories, and the answer is so simple I think I ought to tell it. I get them from a great reservoir of experiences in this town where I grew up -- usually triggered by some dream or thought of event or even a little ditty like this one above that sings in my mind until I respond to it. Perhaps it is also where my sermons came from.

For example this ditty was playing night and day in my mind until I asked Suzanne Reed of Duxbury Free Library if she'd look up its origin for me; I was curious about it. She phoned that it was first seen in public print in 1765, and that its history occupied 2 full pages in the volume *The Oxford Book of Nursery Rhymes*. I was researching Duxbury's origins at this same time when to my surprise I found that a cow had played a prominent part in Dorothy Wentworth's dating of the settlement of Duxbury. Of course the cow was the star of the show the ditty portrayed, with the cat and the dog in supporting roles -- this triggered memories of our dairy farm on North Hill that flourished along with Knowles Parker's farm, now the Duxbury Golf Course, Irving Peterson's farm in Green Harbor and the most prestigious dairy farm of all the Bay Farm standing at the head of Kingston Bay. My father bought North Hill around 1910 with the selling of the pine logs standing on it to Phillip's Box Factory that stood till a few years ago at the corner of Rte. 53 and 14. I spent 5 years off and on at North Hill in various capacities but most enjoyably as milkman in my late high school and early college days, and hence this essay, but I am ahead of my story.



drawn by lot by 2 families and 2 single men. It seems he bought out Edward Winslow's family of the 6 thirteenth interest in this animal, and the 2 thirteenth interest held by Clarke and Pierce. So as in the ditty the most prominent character in the dating of Duxbury's settlement was a cow. The delay from this date of 1628 until full incorporation in 1637 (a full year after Scituate) was occasioned by the necessity of securing a minister for the community. It is an intriguing thought that this secular age with all its many virtues was begun as a "Theocracy," and the Massachusetts Bay Colony was at first organized and operated by a clergy. But that is another story.

A cattle-based economy was a remarkably unified one, with cows to provide milk, butter, and leather for shoes and harnesses; steers to provide red roast beef and stew along with potatoes. Calves and heifers were raised on nearby green pastures and oxen surgically prepared to be beasts of burden. It is often forgotten that in the Northern part of the land, oxen formed the mainstay of our heavy transportation as mules did in the South. It was oxen who hauled the logs to Ashdod mills for sawing into boards, and it was oxen again who moved this lumber to the many shipyards on the Bay. Oxen were used to haul the great granite blocks to build the Standish monument in the 1870's and again in 1898 when after a pause of 27 years when the structure was begun again. The *Clipper* showed a photograph one week of a pair of oxen hauling a carriage full of summer visitors to Gurnet in the days before Gurnet Bridge was built. Can anyone picture riding the 9 or 10 miles over that bumpy beach all the way from the railroad station in Green Harbor to Gurnet? It was oxen who were

Duxbury Clipper

Section 2

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ing I took time to read the printed message on the side of my milk carton from which I poured out the liquid for my morning oatmeal. The legend read that there was no milk in the carton and no milk fat. I thought that perhaps it was time to recall a day in Duxbury when cows and milk were common commodities, and their dominance of our health in an early day must not be forgotten.

I enjoyed calling on that cow-owning family in my parish; it was a Jersey, and brought back memories of my favorite cow on North Hill those 5 summers. She was a combination of Jersey and Holstein. Jerseys gave creamy milk and Holsteins gave great quantities of it, so Ella was a favorite of all. I marvel now at these lush summer days when I lived on North Hill and ran the milk business. We had plenty of competition as this was the height of the so-called "peddlers' era." Milk was a contemporary substance at this time with ice refrigeration, but soured usually after 3 days. This gave a certain urgency to milkmen that no other peddling business demanded and called for a special life style.

I used to rise at 4, load up the milk that had been produced the night before, put through the cooling process and stored in the ice chest. While I distributed this to Island Creek, Standish Shore, Alden Heights and South Duxbury the hired men would busy themselves with clearing out the cow barn, feeding and milking the cows. Two memories are vivid of my visit to Standish Shores, first if I was on time I would see the "Boston Boat" 4 or 5 miles offshore on its way from New York. People today may not realize that as late as these days (1920's), passenger travel by steamship was a common method of transportation. I recall taking a steamer as late as the summer of 1930 from Rockland, ME to Boston overnight. The other recollection was of the security guards surrounding the Boston Mayor's residence to protect him from anarchists during the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti. I would then return to the farm for breakfast at 8 or 8:30, load up the milk from the morning milking and be off to Duxbury Village, Powder Point and Millbrook. Then I would return to the task of washing the milk bottles which were made of heavy glass, and cleaning the milk cooler, a large tank filled with ice water down whose sides hot milk fresh from the cows was trickled to be cooled and aerated. This was in the days before pasteurization, a



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Throughout human history cows and cattle in general have formed the foundation economy of primitive civilizations. They were the basic domestic economy of Colonial America and along with cod fishing and lumber and furs which were export enterprises made a bountiful subsistence for our early forefathers. We are celebrating our 350th anniversary of incorporation (i.e., 1987). A full 17 years after the landing of the Pilgrims in Plymouth, Dorothy Wentworth sets the date of 1628 as that of Duxbury's settlement, recording this from a transaction concerning a cow. We know from Samuel Eliot Morison's account in William Bradford's Pilgrim story *Of the Plimoth Plantation* that the first cattle to come to the colony were 2 cows and a bull brought over by Edward Winslow. There is no record of a cow passenger on the Mayflower. We also know from other Colonial records that by 1627, 156 people in families had laid claim to the cattle brought over in subsequent journeys from England.

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Cows and cattle dominated the farm scene from these early days right down to the days of my first parish in Wiscasset, ME. First the land allotments after 1627 turned into homesteads down through the 1700's and 1800's. Subsistence on a farm with land providing grain and vegetables, lumber and firewood, the sea with its fish and fertilizer, and cattle giving food and drink. And as these farms were cut up into house lots with only a relatively few acres of land 3 staples remained in the life style: a pig in the barn cellar and horses upstairs, a flock of chickens in an adjoining yard and in an ell next the family cow. It was the "dry" periods in the life of the family that got these dairy businesses started. Our regular customers were homes where the cow was waiting to "freshen" her milk supply with the arrival annually of a calf. As late as 1935 one family in Wiscasset still sported a cow in a distant ell. It was this recollection plus the singing nursery rhyme that kept sounding in my mental ear plus the fact that this particular morn-

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Bay Farm was founded by the Loring family that had come to Plymouth Colony in 1635, setting up residence on a farm in Hingham at first. Not long after and before the Revolution they bought land that now would include about 200 acres at the west end of Bay Road (then Border Rd) including a few acres on the north side of the road and also a wide sweep of field on the south side of Bay Rd., down and across the Kinston line. These latter acres were used to grow the corn for the winter fodder and also a few acres of alfalfa for roughage. The farm included the latest type of cow barn with sanitation



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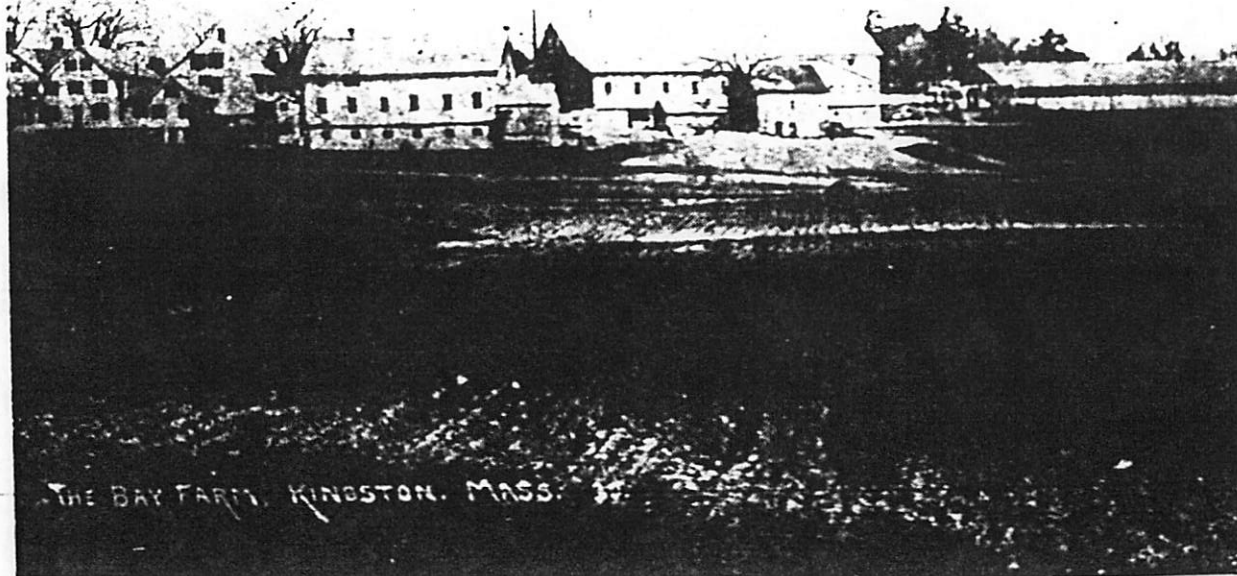
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The workmen had their own dormitory just beyond the cowbarn and 2 houses provided a happy home life for the foreman and his assistant. The present residence at the corner of Bay and Loring roads is built on the original concrete slab that formed the floor of this antiseptically appointed cowbarn. Beyond the cowbarn was a brick combination ice house and milk dispensing facility. Milk fresh from the cows was never touched by hand, but poured directly into the cooler and then automatically bottled -- 8 bottles at a time by a row of rubber-lined faucets. Then it was capped and hermetically sealed and rolled away to the ice storage unit ready for distribution.

The farm was finally sold to the White Brothers, who ran it for 10 years. In the late 40's, part of the land with the barn and several outbuildings was



THE BAY FARM, KINGSTON, MASS. 37

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bought by the Duxbury Playhouse. The barn was rebuilt into a theatre, complete with revolving stage where plays were produced until the end of 1950. The Plymouth Rock Center for Music and Drama used the theatre until it closed in 1955. The theatre was torn down along with other buildings and part of the land divided into house lots. The greater portion of the farm was purchased by the town. For a time the July 4th celebration was held there. The area along Bay Rd., formerly a part of the farm, now contains houses.

Bay Farm was a tremendous enterprise in its heyday, as were all our Duxbury dairy farms. They grew up and flourished to satisfy a need and disappeared when the need was no longer operative. They served as a transition industry between the homesteading era and the present, functioning fully during the peddlers' era. But it is not too late to recall those halcyon days, and to appreciate the place that a cattle-based economy had for our

forefathers. Perhaps I should bring this to a close by telling what Suzanne Reed found about the nursery rhyme with which this essay begins.

It seems that it was a sort of cheer used at athletic contests in Scotland for many years before it got into print. Scholars also say that the "Cat and the Fiddle" in the rhyme refers either to Catherine of Aragon or Catherine the Great of Russia -- "Cat" for Catherine and "la Fidel" meaning the faithful one. I'm inclined to think that it must have been Catherine of Aragon, because Catherine the Great of Russia was contemporary with the nursery rhyme's first printed appearance since she ruled from 1729 to 1796. Beside all that, she had no history of "fidelity" whereas Catherine of Aragon was faithful to her church and accepted Henry VIII's abandonment. But no matter, what the rhyme says or what it is for, it does signal a cow as a significant factor in the life of the human race throughout its history as it did for some many years in Duxbury.

The Rev. Canon Bob Merry about to depart North Hill on his milk route July 1926.



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DUXBURY 350 PHOTO CONTEST

The Duxbury 350th Time Capsule Committee and The Duxbury Clipper are co-sponsoring a photo contest. Winning photographs will be included in the time capsule to be buried September 27, 1987 and opened September 2037. The grand prize winning photograph will be framed and presented to the Selectmen for permanent display.